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Through Thick and Thin

Thomas Jefferson once said, "I predict future happiness for Americans if they can prevent the government from wasting the labors of the people under the pretense of taking care of them."

Today the U.S. government should heed Jefferson's remarks as it waxes and wanes over how to bail out the U.S. economy. We in production agriculture are just going to have to get it done ourselves.

The beef industry has never been in want or need of a handout, and I'm quite certain that those of us knee-deep in beef production are not about to receive one.

The U.S. economy is hurting; jobs are being slashed everyday, and it seems incredible to me that politicians in Washington, who have never run a successful business, think they can spend our hard-earned tax dollars more effectively than we can. How can you fix a lack of confidence by breeding more distrust?

In the beef business, we adjust to markets, Mother Nature and customer demands. We trust one

another. We don't count on bailouts, earmarks and government buyouts.

When something needs to be fixed, we fix it. If our breeding program is not working for our customers, we don't sit around debating it with them; we fix it. If a drought occurs, we adjust. If feed gets too high, we rough 'em along.

The Hereford breed has fixed a lot of things the last 10 years, and change definitely wasn't brought on by a stimulus package. The only stimulus Hereford breeders have had is to maintain and pass on a successful business to the next generation. I'm not sure our politicians are thinking much about our next generation. They have taken on the instant gratification mentality, which is what got our country into this mess in the first place.

Hereford breeders in particular are a resilient bunch. The Hereford breed took everything the exotics could throw at them in the 70s and 80s, everything the order buyers and sale barn operators could discount in the 90s and all 60 some odd branded Angus beef programs that have piggybacked on one another the last decade.

Hereford breeders' resiliency reflects the breed itself. It's ironic that during these tough economic times the Hereford breed is thriving. Hereford bull and female sales remained strong through 2008 and have gotten off to a terrific start in 2009.

John Schmidt, a Hereford breeder from Minnesota, told me he had four new private-treaty customers who bought bulls from him in December, each of them had a black cow herd and he had never met them before. This story is being told all around the country.

In 2008 Hereford production bull sales averaged \$3,283 and bested 2007 bull sale averages by \$221 on the same number of bulls reported. Hereford female sales averaged \$2,762 this past year, down only \$42 from the previous year's sales on 1,000 more lots reported. What's remarkable about these results is that the U.S. commercial cow herd experienced a 1% reduction.

With the decline in calf prices and drought conditions plaguing some key areas of the U.S., it would be a bit optimistic to think that 2009 would compare with 2008; however, the Hereford breed is establishing itself as a breed that can benefit the industry during the toughest of times.

The American Hereford Association database grows stronger with each year of whole herd reporting. Soon, new traits will be available with breeding values for heifer fertility and cow longevity. The inherent efficiency in Hereford genetics designed to reduce feed cost is sure to become a more popular trait as cost of production becomes more important than hide color premiums. We can put trust in the Hereford breed that it can help the commercial industry during the toughest of times. **HW**



Craig Huffhines

Recognizing industry innovators

It was certainly an honor to recognize Lacey Livestock, Ford County Feed Yard and National Beef Packing Co. LLC with the Hereford Industry Innovator Award at the 2009 National Western Stock Show.

Upon receiving his bronze bull at the Hereford Pen and Carload Show, John Lacey said, "I want to thank the American Hereford Association for working with Lacey Livestock and Harris Ranch Beef Co. to study what we have already known for a long time about planned crossbreeding. The Hereford breed added pounds to our calves, efficiency in the feedlot and our black-baldie females are more fertile than our straight Angus females. It was no surprise to us and we will continue to incorporate Hereford genetics into our breeding program." **HW**